

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ continues to investigate fish kill, permit exceedance in Pearl River

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BATON ROUGE -- Department of Environmental Quality officials are continuing to investigate an extensive fish kill incident that affected the Pearl River in Washington and St. Tammany parishes.

There are several aspects of the event that are areas of concern. One is the timeline regarding Temple-Island's report of the spill and when the spill actually occurred. DEQ was notified by Temple-Inland after 5 p.m. on Saturday, Aug. 13, of a fish kill well after the notification from the media. When responders arrived, they noticed the fish had been dead for some time. Failure to notify timely is a violation of the facility's permit, as is permit exceedances. Other aspects of the investigation include how the upset occurred, how future upsets can be prevented and the water quality assessments in Pearl River, which scientists continue to sample.

DEQ was notified of the fish kill on Aug. 13 when a media source called the department. The department immediately mobilized and water quality experts began assessing the situation. On Aug. 17, Temple-Inland Bogalusa Paper Mill stated in a letter to the department that the facility had an exceedance of its maximum permit limit for biological oxygen demand, which it believes led to the depleted oxygen levels killing thousands of fish.

"The department has been thoroughly engaged in this unfortunate event since it was first notified," said DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch. "We will thoroughly investigate this incident and take the appropriate enforcement actions as the science dictates. This is an example of why timely reporting of an upset or permit exceedances is an important part of the permit. With a timely notification, this may not have reached the level of impact that it did."